

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization

Phillips Neighborhood Lead Collaborative:
Final Report

A CONSORTIUM PROJECT OF: Augsburg College; College of St. Catherine; Hamline University; Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs; Macalester College; Metropolitan State University; Minneapolis Community College; Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program; University of Minnesota (Center for Urban and Regional Affairs; Children, Youth and Family Consortium; Minnesota Extension Service); University of St. Thomas; and Minneapolis community and neighborhood representatives.

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
University of Minnesota
330 Humphrey Center

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by
Chue Kong Thao

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FINAL REPORT

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"The danger of lead and how to prevent!"

Introduction

My job description

With the help of Susan Gust and Amos Deinard, this ^{under}graduate research assistant position turned into an internship. The goal for this research project is to develop a path to access culturally specific neighborhood service providers in order to help prevent lead contamination in children. Another goal is to stress the positive effect of prevention in the lead program.

Background of the issue

Childhood lead poisoning has become the number one environmental health threat for our children, particularly poor children in inner cities who are at high risk. In the mid-80s, a federal government survey found that three to four million pre-school children were lead poisoned. That's about one out of every six children under the age of six in the United States. The newest official government figures show that 1.7 million young children, or about 8.9% of all American pre-schoolers, have levels of lead in their blood that are considered dangerous. In Minneapolis alone, more than 50 % of all inner city children are living with toxic levels of lead in their bodies. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is no such thing as a safe level of lead.

The typical case of lead poisoning is not as immediately life threatening as in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or seriously disabling as in Cerebral Palsy. However, what makes lead poisoning so dangerous is that it's so common in this country today. Recent studies have shown that even small amounts of lead can cause irreversible damage to young children's developing brains, can decrease IQ, and can cause behavioral and learning problems. Because of this detrimental effect on the intellectual potential of each new generation, lead poisoning has been called "the most common and societal devastating disease of young children."

The good news is that lead poisoning can be prevented easily, due to the fact that lead can be easily identified in the human blood. We also know how young children can get lead poisoning and what we can do to eliminate the disease. The Phillips Neighborhood Lead Collaborative will be teaching the residents about some sources of lead, its effects on children, the interpretation of blood tests, nutrition to combat lead in the blood level, reducing exposure to lead paint, dust and soil by means of cleaning, hygiene and home and yard maintenance. Moreover, literature will also be distributed to the residents. This education will be culturally-specific.

In addition, it is important to get the words out "HARD & LOUD " to the Hmong families, families with low income, and families that live in the inner-city. For example, in the Hmong community a large number of families are not aware of lead poisoning. Most parents do not know that lead can do harm to their children; therefore, it is important for us (advocacy) to convey to the Hmong parents and many other families that this is a serious problem, and to let them know that lead poisoning can destroy their children's future if they do not do something about it before it gets into the child's body.

Throughout my internship, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to contact many agencies. One particular person that I met is Pam Thao at the St. Paul Public Health Department, who has been working with the lead issue for over seven years. When I asked Pam what it was like working with the lead issues, she said working with the lead issue has been very tough. Many Hmong parents do not understand when the doctor tells them their child has been diagnosed with elevated blood lead. They say the public health department does not have any work to do and for this reason, we create work by telling them that their children have lead poisoning. These situations sadden Pam; however, she does not give up. She still tries very hard to get the word out to the Hmong community.

Pam also told me a story which happened just before my interview with her. A single mom found out that her child had lead poisoning. She got very upset and told Pam and the nurse that her child was perfectly fine. However, after the third time that her child tested positive for high blood levels of lead, Pam and a nurse were asked to do a home assessment, but the woman refused to cooperate. She tried a few times to schedule the home visit, but the woman refused. Pam had no choice but to tell her that if she was not willing to cooperate with the public health department, a court order would be the next step. The woman finally agreed to schedule the home visit, although she said, "Only on one condition, after this visit the public health department will leave me alone!" Pam could not argue any more, so she agreed with her. She still remembers the whole time that she and the nurse were at the woman's house. This woman was standing up the whole time talking to them. She was so upset about the whole situation, that she couldn't even sit down to talk. The only reason she agreed to meet with Pam and the nurse was to avoid the court order. After that visit, the public health department could not ask her to bring her child back to have the blood test for lead again; however, they still do check with her

medical clinic once in a while to see how the woman's child is doing. As a matter of fact, the last two times the public health department checked, the child was doing a lot better.

I agree with Pam totally. The lead symptoms are not like a swollen foot or a rash on the skin; they are hidden symptoms not visible to the eye. Since the child is not seriously in pain, many Hmong parents may distrust the medical treatment. (This may lead to a state of emergency where they will bring the child to the hospital.) This situation is what lead educators want to see prevented.

Services:

Below are several of the different agencies and services that I have contacted and met work with. These agencies can help us get educational materials about lead to the Hmong population.

Pillsbury Neighborhood Services Waite House

2529 13th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404
Phone: (612) 721-1681

Contact person: Xao Vang

Duties: He serves as an Asian Program Specialist by creating activities for young Asian youth, and gives out Hmong language lessons to Hmong youth. Waite House also has programs that assist individuals to find rental housing.

Hmong Woman Association

1518 E Lake Street
Minneapolis, MN 55407
Phone: (612) 724-3600

This program provides assistance to Hmong women and their families as they adjust and adapt to a new life in Minnesota. It also helps advance Hmong women from traditional, subservient roles and to continue the Hmong Cultural heritage. The organization also provide support for Hmong women, as they achieve self-sufficiency, self-respect, and leadership skills.

Phillips T.L.C.(Tender Loving Care)

2414 Park Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404
Phone: 874-1960

Tender Loving Care is a program that provides prenatal care and free pregnancy testing to any woman living in the Phillips Neighborhood. For a woman to qualify for this program, she must be pregnant at about twenty-eight weeks or less and has to be a Phillips resident. This program serves a very diverse population. However, Native Americans and African Americans are among the two largest groups that receive services from this program. There is also a Hmong staff person on board who is working with the Hmong population.

Minnesota Extension Service

University of Minnesota Hennepin County
1525 Glenwood Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55405-1264
Phone: 374-8400

Program: Nutrition Education Assistant Expand Food & Nutrition Education Program. This program serves single parents, or parents who depend on financial assistance. The goal of this program is to teach families to eat healthy food and to be aware of obesity. Furthermore, the program also provides lessons and workshops on how to cook healthy food. The staff members of the program go to the home of a person who is in the program to help that person cook a healthy meal. The program is culturally-specific. For example, the Hmong staff works with the Hmong population and a Native American staff works specifically with the Native American population.

Hmong American Partnership

Main Office
450 North Syndicate, Suite 35
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
Phone: 642-9601

Branch Office
1525 North Glenwood Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55405

There are several programs in this agency, such as the:

Self-Sufficiency Programs: This helps Hmong families plan for economic independence, find jobs, and leave public assistance. Strategies include: family employment development

plan, motivational training, job seeking skills, mentors, and follow up. In addition, activities such as family get-togethers and celebrations help build a community among the families who have been in the program.

Family Programs: This program seeks to increase the well being of the Hmong family in Minnesota. The program called "**Parent Skill Training**" help the families recognize that the foundation of a strong family ties in having skilled parents. Each year, the HA Parents Skill Training conducts a four-part workshop to 500 parents at Twin Cities public schools, community centers, and churches. The workshop curriculum include: comparing parenting in Laos and the US, understanding the difference between discipline and punishment, and learning the basics of child development.

Youth Programs: The Hmong Youth Programs seek to develop educational & cultural skills in the young Hmong. This program is called "**Hmong Youth Pride**". Its objective is to help Hmong youngsters to stay away from drugs and crime. It also provides mentors, recreational, and cultural activities after school for Hmong children in the Twin Cities elementary and two Public Housing areas.

Materials that have been translated from one language to another language about Lead poisoning

Due to the differences in languages, when information from one language is translated into another, the content of that information may not be exactly the same, or the people reading the information may not receive the same message. This is a problem that also occurs in the educational information about lead poisoning.

In the Hmong culture, we do not have a word for "LEAD." Many parents think lead is rust, paint, and aluminum, but the fact is that lead is none of the above. The word "lead" is very complex to define, which is why it is really hard for the Hmong people to understand. Even the many translations that have been made could not give a clear definition of what lead is. Furthermore, the translations about the nutrition information are not clear. This translated information is largely used in the St. Paul areas. Many food items, such as cheese, yogurt, and milk are not the main diet of many Hmong families, hence the parents do not use this information. Also this kind of nutrition information does not help, because if the children do not like the food, the parents will not force their children to eat.

To complicate the problem more, many Hmong families are now trying to own their own homes. The lead issue is not a priority when many of these families look for homes to buy. Their main goal is to find one with a reasonable price that is in good shape. Many of the homes that are reasonably priced and in good shape are homes that were built before 1980. Unfortunately, many of these families are not aware that about 74 percent of privately-

owned, occupied housing units in the United States built before 1980 contain lead based paint. It would be great if all the private homes were lead abated before they could be sold again. However, abating a home can be costly, hence many of these homes just get repainted and then are advertised for sale.

The translations and the home buying are my two main concerns, because I do not know how to approach these people and tell them about the dangers of lead and also how to convey to them that lead poisoning is preventable. In addition, I feel that educators need to inform the Asian community about the dangers of lead, and let them know that even a small amount of lead can cause irreversible damage to a child's developing nervous system.

Getting lead information out to the Asian community

I feel that the word "LEAD" has not caught many of the parents' attention yet. The reason for this is because the majority of the older Hmong parents cannot read or write, or their reading and writing skills are very low. As a result, the information that has been given out has not caught much of the parents' attention since it's in written format. Also, many of the parents that can read and write do not take the time to sit down and look at the information. For this information to get out to the people more, I feel that the lead collaborative and other agencies need to get knowledgeable people to give presentations and workshops about lead safety to the community.

Another problem in the Asian community is that the older parents tend to use folk medicines to cure their children, especially in the Hmong community. To my understanding, they do not know that many of the folk medicines contain lead, especially those that contain minerals. They continue to use these folk medicines while, often times, the lead inside the child's body builds up. As a result, the lead reaches the toxic level and the child will become lead poisoned. I strongly encouraged the lead collaborative and other agencies to teach these parents how to prevent this from happening.

A few sensitive issues involve Hmong tradition and religion. For example, there was a family that had been seeing the social worker, who is the supervisor for my internship. This family was referred by a doctor who found out that one of their eight children had been contaminated by lead. As a result, the public health department issued an order to the landlord to have the house abated. During the process, the family could not stay there. Fortunately, they got a certificate to a section 8 housing. The family was lucky that the house could be fixed right away, and that the landlord at the section 8 housing had agreed to complete the house by the end of March. Unfortunately, when the family got to the new home on April 1, it was not finished. There were still door knobs to be put on, the bathroom still needed to have some work done, and some of the windows were not

completely finished. The family is homeless because they have no place to go. All the family could do was take turns staying at their grandparents house and at relatives' houses. This is very difficult for the family. The hardest part is that the wife will go into labor in about two weeks. In Hmong tradition, it is believed that a woman in labor who stays at a home other than her own will bring ill fortune to the family of that home, hence she cannot stay in anyone else's home but her own. Because of this traditional belief, the family will not be able to stay at their grandparents home or any relatives's homes. Therefore, advocates and educators need to be sensitive to religious beliefs and traditions in the Hmong community.

PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Six months ago I thought I would never be able to work at People of Phillips especially dealing with the lead issue. The reason is that I didn't know much about lead and what lead is exactly. It is surprising that now I have gained so much knowledge of what lead poisoning is all about. I still remember asking my supervisor for the definition of lead. It was embarrassing, even though it was the only way to get a concrete idea of what lead is all about.

I enjoyed working at People of Phillips especially with the staff. Moreover, knowledge of lead poisoning is not the only thing that I will take it with me, but also the Phillips Neighborhood. I have seen amazing progress in the Phillips Neighborhood, and I admire it. The residents involved in the Lead Collaborative are very supportive, and most of all, they are very active in the community.

The Phillips Neighborhood Lead Collaborative is also an inspiration to the Phillips residents and to the Phillips Neighborhood. I have seen so much hard work from the members and the commitment of their time to this collaborative. This collaborative is one step forward for the people in the Phillips Neighborhood in advancing a better health for their children.

In addition, I wanted to thank Susan Gust, Doc Davis, and Dr. Amos Deinard, for making my internship possible.

Last but not least, thanks to Ed Petsche and Joan Gudof for being the teachers, the guidance, and for being patient in working with me. I am sure I would not have been able to finish my internship if I did not have them to help guide me through this process.